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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 000599

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CASC](#) [AF](#) [IR](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: JAPAN-IRAN: VISIT OF DIRECTOR GENERAL TO TOKYO;
DEMARCHES ON LEVINSON AND SABERI CASES

REF: A. 07 TOKYO 5568
[1](#)B. 07 TOKYO 5609
[1](#)C. NEW YORK 243

TOKYO 00000599 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jim P. Zumwalt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for East Asia and Oceania Nematollah Izadi visited Tokyo March 9-12 for semi-annual Director General-level meetings. His discussions with counterpart Director General for Middle Eastern Affairs Toshiro Suzuki and Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Kenichiro Sasae broke no new ground. However, Japan is interested in "testing" whether Iran is serious about wanting to play a more constructive role by offering to cooperate on several small projects involving Afghanistan. Separately, MOFA officials March 16 raised with Iranian officials both in Tokyo and Tehran the cases of missing Amcits Robert Levinson and Roxana Saberi. In a subsequent meeting with DG Suzuki on March 17, Iranian Ambassador Seyed Abbas Araghchi said Saberi is an Iranian citizen, that her arrest was not related to her status as a journalist but rather to her illegal possession of alcohol, and that he expects her to be released on bail "soon." END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) DG Izadi's visit to Tokyo was to participate in the fourth Directors General Consultations meeting, a series of exchanges that commenced two years ago, reported MOFA Second Middle East Division Principal Deputy Director Yukiya Hamamoto. The meetings are held twice a year and alternate between Tokyo and Tehran. (NOTE: Iran and Japan have held annual meetings at the Vice Minister level for the past 18 years. END NOTE.) Izadi arrived on March 9 and that evening Iranian Ambassador Seyad Abbas Araghchi hosted a dinner in his honor to which MOFA officials were invited. On March 10 he paid a courtesy call on Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Sasae, and on March 11 met for half the day and had lunch with his counterpart, MOFA Director General for Middle Eastern and African Affairs Suzuki. Hamamoto showed Political Officer a half-inch sheath of paper which he said represented the talking points prepared for the visit, and lamented that both Izadi and Suzuki had basically read through them word-for-word. "I'm not sure why they couldn't have just e-mailed these to each other," he confided.

THE USUAL BILATERAL ISSUES

[1](#)3. (C) Discussions held between Izadi and Sasae and Suzuki conformed to those held fairly routinely between Iran and Japan, reported Hamamoto. The highlights:

-- IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: Sasae and Suzuki both stressed to Izadi that Iran must act in a constructive manner with regard to the rest of the international community, and that Tehran must take the initiative to improve its relations with others, particularly the United States. Iran should not pass up the opportunity to engage with the new U.S. Administration, the Japanese urged Izadi. He replied that Iran has been listening to the statements coming from the United States but is waiting for action, stating: "It is up to the U.S., but frankly we do not know what to do at this moment." Ambassador Araghchi appeared to "correct" Izadi's statement, adding that the reason Tehran has been slow to respond to U.S. overtures is because Iran has been deceived by the West in the past and therefore has decided not to act in a premature manner. Hamamoto said that the different nuances in these two responses was noted, and that MOFA's take-away was not an encouraging one. Japan believes Iran remains in a "listening mode" and that its professional diplomats and bureaucrats are skeptical about a dialogue with the United States. Sasae encouraged the Iranians to do something, noting that expectations are rising and that Iran should respond.

-- URANIUM ENRICHMENT: Sasae told Izadi that Japan is concerned about the "rumor" that Iran has enriched enough uranium to construct a weapon, and worries that Iran intends to follow the path of North Korea. Izadi and Araghchi both responded that talks should be based on facts, not rumors, and repeated the often-made Iranian position that their nuclear program is purely for civilian purposes. Suzuki told them Iran should comply with the will of the international community as expressed in the Security Council resolutions pertaining to this issue.

TOKYO 00000599 002.2 OF 003

-- MIDDLE EAST PEACE: The Japanese stressed to Izadi that Iran must play a constructive role in bringing peace to the region, which will be impossible if one side (Hamas) refuses to recognize the existence of the other. According to Hamamoto, Izadi "repeated Iranian propaganda" about Israel. In response to a question from Political Officer, Hamamoto said there had been no discussion of the recent seizure of an Iranian ship bound for Syria bearing arms, or of Japan's role on the Security Council in addressing this issue.

-- ECONOMIC COOPERATION: Both sides expressed a desire for improved economic cooperation, but the Japanese said this would not be possible without the "proper environment" both with regard to Iran's internal and external behavior. The Japanese complained to Izadi about the fact that the work of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) personnel on an environmental project in Iran was being "obstructed" by Iranian authorities.

-- CULTURAL AND CONSULAR MATTERS: Both sides noted the upcoming 80th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Iran, with the Iranians stating they would like to do something (unspecified) to mark this anniversary in May. Consular discussions focused on visas and other "technical matters," according to Hamamoto.

"TESTING" ON AFGHANISTAN

14. (C) On Afghanistan, Japan's message to Izadi was that the unsettled situation in that country is of concern to the entire international community, not just to the United States or NATO, and that Iran needs to play a constructive role in resolving the conflict. Izadi replied that Iran has been acting in a constructive manner with regard to Afghanistan and would be willing to do more. No specifics were discussed, but Hamamoto told Political Officer that Japan seeks to "test" Iran's expressed willingness to cooperate by

proposing several small-scale joint projects Tokyo and Tehran can collaborate on. One possibility Japan is considering would be to jointly train and equip Afghan border police. Another would be to work with the Iranians to help alleviate the Afghan refugee situation, which would include offering vocational training to refugees, assisting in the return to Afghanistan of qualified refugees, and providing humanitarian support for Afghan refugees in Iran.

15. (C) According to Hamamoto, this idea was vetted with State Department officials during a March 9 visit to NEA's Iran Desk by Second Middle East Division Director Katsuhiko Takahashi, who came away from the meeting with the impression that the Department would have no problems with the Japanese proceeding along these lines. Accordingly, MOFA presented these ideas to the Iranian embassy in Tokyo on March 16. The initial reaction was positive, but the embassy cautioned that it must ask Tehran for guidance. Hamamoto said that if the Iranians agree to these proposals, MOFA will issue a joint press statement sometime near the end of March.

LEVINSON AND SABERI CASES

16. (C) Hamamoto also advised us that following Takahashi's meeting with the Iran Desk, Japan has raised with the Iranians the cases of missing/detained Amcits Levinson and Saberi. (NOTE: This is at least the second time Japan has formally demarched Iran on the Levinson case, see Refs A and 1B. END NOTE.) MOFA spoke with the Iranian Embassy on March 16 and also instructed its embassy in Tehran to raise it there. On March 17, DG Suzuki called Ambassador Araghchi to MOFA to meet and discuss the Saberi case. According to Hamamoto, Ambassador Araghchi "took note" of DG Suzuki's demarche, but replied that Saberi is a citizen of Iran, which does not recognize dual-nationality. Her father is Iranian, and under Iranian law she is therefore considered to be an Iranian citizen and a Muslim. Her arrest, he continued, had nothing to do with her status as a journalist, but rather was a straightforward case of illegal consumption of alcohol. Ambassador Araghchi concluded by saying that the Iranian legal process is ongoing, but that he expects Saberi to be released on bail "soon."

BIO INFO

TOKYO 00000599 003.2 OF 003

17. (C) According to a bio provided to us by MOFA, Izadi was born August 11, 1957. (NOTE: Hamamoto volunteered that Izadi looked much older than 51. END NOTE.) He earned a bachelors degree in Political Science and a masters degree in International Relations, both from the University of Tehran. He is married and has one son and one daughter. The only information about his career path begins in 1989-90, when he served as Director General for Eastern Europe. From 1990 to 1994 he was Iran's ambassador to the Soviet Union and Russia, followed by an assignment from 1994 until 1998 as Advisor to the Foreign Minister. In 1998 he became ambassador to Oman, where he served until 2002. Between 2002 and 2005 he was Assistant to the Undersecretary for European and American Affairs. He assumed his current position as Director General for East Asia and Oceania in 2005. Izadi has visited Japan twice before, accompanying Foreign Minister Mottaki in February 2006 and to attend the second Director Generals consultation meeting in March 2008. Hamamoto reported that during his meetings, Izadi read from his talking points without deviating or adding personal comments. Although the papers were prepared in Farsi, Izadi made his presentation in English, which Hamamoto described as passable, but not great.

COMMENT

18. (C) COMMENT: The Iranians and Japanese broke no new ground during Izadi's visit, with both sides reportedly repeating the same talking points that are always used during the fairly frequent high and medium level exchanges the two countries engage in. Japan will continue to believe that the best way to engage Iran is to be non-confrontational, as is demonstrated by its desire to propose cooperative endeavors with Iran to address issues pertaining to Afghanistan, and by its preference to avoid contentious issues, such as Japan's role in the currently ongoing issue before the U.N. Sanctions Committee regarding an interdicted Iranian arms shipment bound for Syria (Ref C). Japan's eagerness to leverage its "normal" relationship with Iran to act as an intermediary between Washington and Tehran is demonstrated by its willingness to engage with the Iranians on issues such as the Levinson and Saberi cases. MOFA wishes to work closely with the Department on issues concerning Iran, and Embassy encourages ongoing exchanges of information with Japanese officials working the Iran portfolio. END COMMENT.

ZUMWALT